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[Founded 1899.

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Primary Aims.

The chief objects of the Association are the encouragement and dissemination of literature based upon science and critical research, and tending at once to the liberation of human reason from mere tradition and to its proper exercise on the growing material of knowledge. Truth is infinitely great, and great is that part of truth which has already been brought to light, but, in order that truth may be used in the world at large, it needs that the ignorant shall be taught, that the apathetic shall be aroused, that myths shall be analysed, sophisms exposed and irrational dogmas refuted.

It is not enough that new truths be revealed in study or laboratory and discussed in academic precincts or scientific journals. Truth, so far as it bears on life and aspirations of mankind or on the universe to which common experience introduces us, belongs to all men. Those whose education has been neglected, and those who have been educated under a false system which affords no connected view of natural knowledge, have been robbed of their manifest birthright. This the R. P. A. seeks to restore, by making the truth of nature and reason increasingly accessible to all.

A Definition of Rationalism.

Those who join the Association do not thereby subscribe to any definite creed, positive or negative. There is breadth enough in Rationalism for all views which do not contradict the ascertained truths of science. At the same time, something more is to be understood by Rationalism than a mere rationalistic spirit or tendency. Rationalism repudiates irrational authority. It takes actual human experience to be the material, and trained human intelligence to be the builder, of the growing edifice of truth. It challenges the believers in miraculous revelation to produce evidence for their belief. It demands by
what right certain people seek to impose theological or other dogmas upon mankind. Thus, after careful consideration, aided by the advice of several well-known thinkers, the following definition of Rationalism has been adopted and embodied in the Memorandum of Association of the R. P. A.:

**Rationalism may be defined as the mental attitude which unreservedly accepts the supremacy of reason and aims at establishing a system of philosophy and ethics verifiable by experience and independent of all arbitrary assumptions or authority.**

It is to be observed that most Protestants are rationalists in their attitude towards contemporary or recent instances of alleged miracle and inspiration. They are rationalists in their attitude towards the sacred literatures of Buddhists, Brahmans, Parsees, and Mohammedans, and towards the distinctive teachings of the Church of Rome. As regards the narrative and theology contained in the Bible, however, they are not rationalists, but at best compromisers between traditional reverence and scientific inquiry. Thus, while what has been called "the spirit of rationalism" is rise, the attempt to raise rationalism into a consistent rule of the intellectual life is by no means popular. This, however, is the task which the R. P. A. seeks to accomplish.

**Rationalism and Morality.**

In making direct mention of ethics in the foregoing definition of Rationalism, it is desired to accentuate the fact that the philosophy of Rationalism cannot fail to have bearings on human conduct which will be far more beneficent in the long run than those of traditional theology. Granting that supernaturalism has had its place in the evolution of a rational code of morals, it has, nevertheless, formed the husk rather than the kernel of moral advancement. In many respects it has been detrimental to the progress and well-being of the human race, and its moral influence, despite all the efforts of ecclesiastical bodies, has only sufficed to deflect the lives of the few.

It is often assumed that those who relinquish the ancient religious beliefs leave themselves without motives or incentives to resist temptation and to lead good and upright lives. But, whenever this appears to be the case, the blame is to be laid (1) on the religions themselves, which have held out illusory and largely ineffectual bribes of supernatural reward, or threats of supernatural retribution, and ignored the powerful reasons for morality which lie in man's social nature and needs; (2) on the individual doubters, who are not sufficiently earnest in their search for truth to make a serious study of the natural and human grounds of moral law. The mental realisation of these grounds must tend towards the practical realisation of the good life, although acquired habits of character cannot be suddenly transformed by changes of opinion. While the R. P. A. has not at present any organisation to take the place of the older religious churches (such as the Positivist and Ethical Societies possess), it is hoped that a tacit fellowship will grow up among its widely scattered members, tending to promote the ultimate unity of the various sections of liberal thinkers. Wherever there is true devotion to human well-being, and proper regard for the happiness of all sentient creatures, there is true religion, or (if exception be taken to that word) something better than religion; and, whatever our views of the constitution of the universe may be, Nature remains, for those who follow the paths of reason and science, a supreme source of wonder, and inspiration.

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The Rationalist Press Association, Ltd., is "a Company Limited by Guarantee and not having a Capital divided into shares." It is a propagandist, not a
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Any person above the age of twenty-one may, with the consent of the Board, become a member, on payment of an annual subscription of not less than five shillings. The subscription is payable in advance in the month of January of each year. A member may, on his own application, retire from the Association upon giving one month's notice in writing to the Secretary. A copy of each new publication of the Association will be sent, post free, to each member who does not specify "books only by request"; always provided that the total value of the publications forwarded during the year does not exceed the amount of the member's subscription for that year.

The minimum subscription has been fixed at five shillings, in order not to exclude sympathisers of small means from membership; but a set of books issued in one year has amounted to twenty-eight shillings in aggregate price, so that members subscribing that amount or less had the full value of their subscriptions returned in this way. It should also be said that the activity of the Association has hitherto depended to a great extent on the generosity of supporters who have subscribed or presented much larger amounts than could be returned in the shape of literature.

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BY

ERNST HAECKEL

(Ph.D., M.D., LL.D., Sc.D., and Professor at the University of Jena).

TRANSLATED BY JOSEPH McCABE

[ Issued for the Rationalist Press Association, Limited ]

WATTS & CO.,

17, JOHNSON'S COURT, FLEET STREET, LONDON, E.C.

1903